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17 November 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL ROBERT CUTLER

SUBJECT: Uniform Standard of Risk of Detection

1. In accordance with your request, here is the paragraph stating the point I was making in the discussion yesterday:

The purpose of all programs in the countermeasures field is to create and maintain a risk of detection that the Soviets would regard as unacceptable, so that they would refrain from attempting clandestine introduction of weapons. Hence, so far as feasible, there should be a single guiding determination of what this "unacceptable" level of risk is for the Soviets, and the determination should set a general guideline by which all programs should be measured. In a matter so heavily affected by considerations of practicality, there probably cannot be absolute or even approximate uniformity in result, but there should be uniformity in objective.

2. Since the meeting, I have raised this question with the Board of National Estimates. While they are most reluctant to state any specific percentage figure for the "unacceptable" level of risk I think we could provide at least a general verbal statement of what it is judged to be. Consensus of opinion -- which I know was shared by General Bull -- is that for the present at least a very slight risk of detection would be regarded as "unacceptable" by the Soviets.

3. In submitting this, I am very conscious of the danger of oversimplifying a complex subject. As you pointed out, in the case of packages the only security of any sort is provided by the sampling process. In the case of any method involving people, the whole internal security and intelligence setup giving warning or providing for apprehension after entry must be taken into account.

4. Moreover, the general argument in favor of uniformity

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certainly should not lead to the conclusion that because you cannot exert any degree of control over one or more methods of introduction (such as the diplomatic pouch) you should refrain from taking measures to improve your controls in other ways. The question in each instance is two-fold: (1) raising demonstrably inadequate standards; (2) improving all standards to the degree that additional effort produces worthwhile results without exorbitant cost and effort.

/s/ 25X1A9a

NSC Board Assistant

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